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Russia's Pershing Ploy

Soviet arms control proposals since Yuri Andropov's accession to the position of leader of the Soviet Communist Party suggest that we are witnessing the beginning of a new Soviet peace offensive, in which the Soviets are using the carrot and the stick to preserve the bulk of their military buildup while frustrating the Western response.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the Soviet approach to the negotiations on intermediate-range missiles. On the one hand, the Soviets offer to reduce the number of their missiles to the size of the British and French forces; on the other hand, they indicate that if their proposal is not accepted, they will be compelled by the deployment of Pershing II missiles in Western Europe to adopt a "launch on warning" posture.

Whatever one thinks of the carrot, it is clear the Soviet stick is a fraud. Soviet military and political officials for years have talked about "launch on warning" as the basis for Soviet retaliation. For example, as long ago as 1967, Marshal Krylov wrote in the restricted and highly authoritative journal, *Military Thought*: "With the presence in the armament of troops of launchers and missiles which are completely ready for operation, as well as systems for detecting enemy missile launches and other types of reconnaissance, an aggressor is no longer able suddenly to destroy the missiles before their launch on the territory of the country against which the aggression is committed. They will have time during the flight of the missiles of the aggressor to leave their launchers and inflict a retaliatory strike against the enemy."

Indeed, this was so commonly accepted by Soviet leaders that Brezhnev once said, according to a report carried in *The Post* on Nov. 18, 1978: "Carter and I know we both have a couple dozen minutes when satellites will tell us missiles are coming. . . . I will still have time to respond."

In addition, we should recognize that the first-strike threat presented by the Pershing IIs is less than meets the eye.

Only 108 of these missiles are scheduled to be deployed. Since each of them will carry only one warhead, and since targeting plans typically assign two warheads to each hardened target, this force poses a first-strike threat to only 54 Soviet missiles, out of a total Soviet ICBM force of almost 1,400 missiles.

Nor do the Pershings represent a significant threat to the national Soviet command and control system, which is highly centralized around the capital, since they cannot reach Moscow. In short, these missiles, despite their ability to hit the western U.S.S.R., cannot possibly pose a disarming first-strike threat.

It would appear, therefore, that the new Soviet proposal is designed to play on the hopes and fears of Americans and Europeans with the objective of arousing Western public opinion to put pressure on Western governments to make concessions in the arms talks.

It is not surprising that Andropov should embrace such a policy. In a speech on June 5, 1974, he declared that "the real changes in the correlation of forces inevitably cause changes in the views of people and in the minds of political and state figures. . . . Public opinion forces the ruling circles to reckon with its desire to eliminate the threat of war [our emphasis]."

This does not mean it is impossible to reach agreement with the Soviet Union or that Western governments should respond inflexibly to the positive aspects of Soviet proposals. It does mean, however, that in assessing Soviet proposals, we should harbor no illusions about Moscow's negotiating strategy.

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